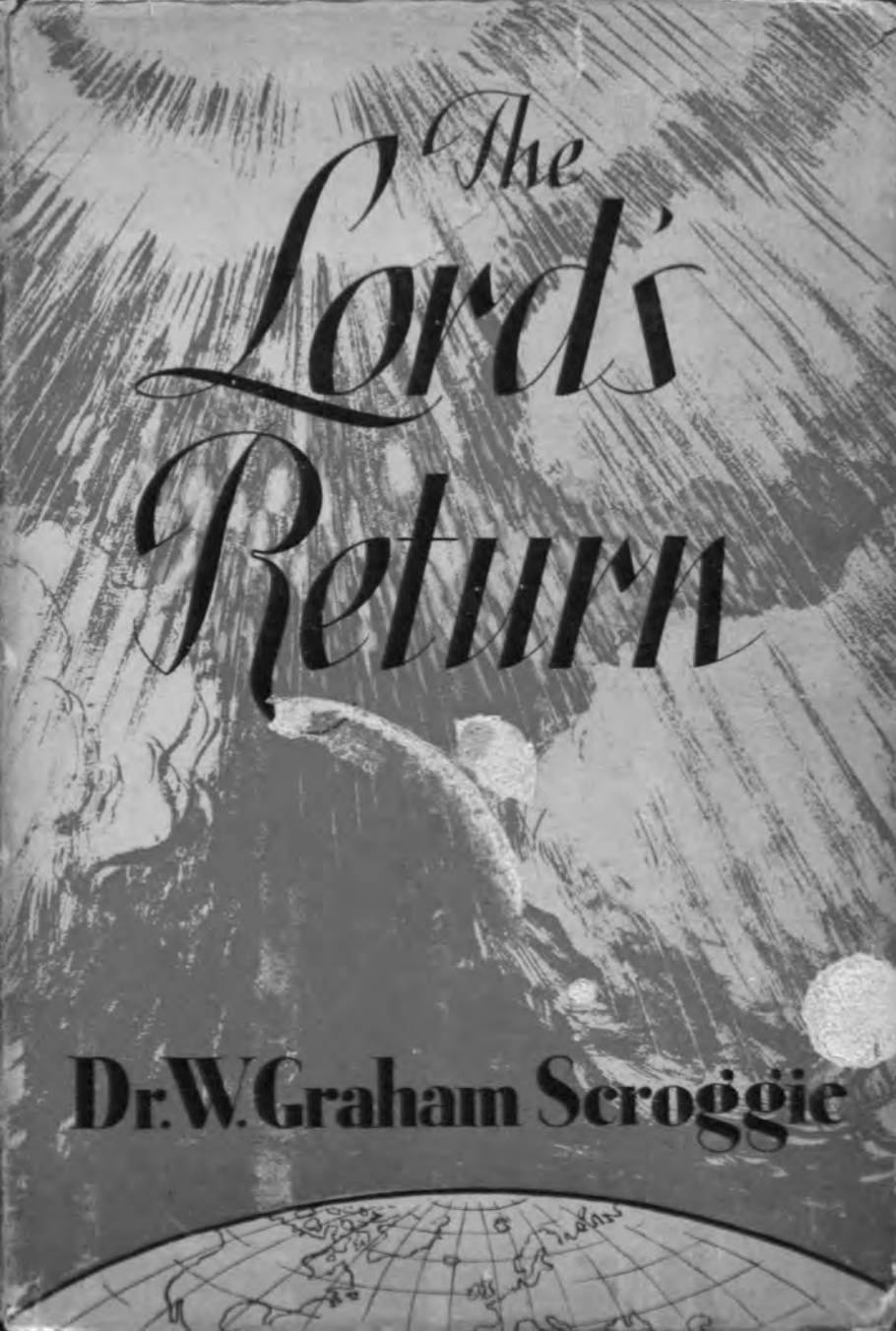




The Lord's Return

Dr. W. Graham Scroggie

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TO those who fervently believe in the imminence of the Second Coming of our Lord, a book such as this will make a special appeal. They will find in the seven excellent chapters which comprise the volume much to deepen and strengthen their faith in what is to them of such vital import. The subject is considered in its philosophical, historical, and evidential aspects ; but it does not leave the matter there, for this truth has also its ethical and practical bearing. Not only to students of prophecy, but indeed to all, this book will repay careful study, for truly it is a most helpful contribution to a subject whose very urgency proclaims its supreme importance.

THE LORD'S RETURN

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BY

Dr. W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE



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THE GOAL OF HISTORY

THE LORD'S RETURN

CHAPTER I

The Goal of History

"CHRIST the first fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming. Then . . . the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father ; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. 15. 23-25).

EVERY thoughtful person has, I suppose, some philosophy of history, some theory as to the meaning and end of organised life on earth. Through the ages many theories have been promulgated, and these, for convenience sake, may be grouped under two general headings: (1) The View of the World ; and (2) The View of Christendom ; and under each of these there are two distinct theories.

Under the view of the world are the theories: that in history good and evil

will struggle with one another endlessly; and that in history the good will triumph over the evil by human evolution.

Under the view of Christendom are the theories that the end of history will be the triumph of the good by the diffusion of Christian principles; and that the end of history will be human failure, and the personal return of Christ to judge and to rule.

Now, in all questions as to the future of humanity, we must either picture this future for ourselves, or look to God to reveal it.

Then consider first,

I. View of the World

that is, of man estranged from God.

The first theory tells of

CEASELESS STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE GOOD AND THE EVIL

This, the ancient theory, views history as "cycles of existence, ever returning upon themselves; life moving in circles to work out old problems as it has worked them out before for the billionth time; no progress; no issue;" no developing plot of the human

drama that comes to its dénouement ; but just endless circumferences, around which life moves monotonously.

The Stoic teaching was that: "He who has seen the present has seen all that has been throughout eternity, and all that will be throughout eternity." "Whosoever is forty years of age, if he but possess some understanding, has in some sort seen all the past and all the future." "The world is incessant change, life mere opinion, and everything human is smoke."

At the beginning of Ecclesiastes the preacher is in the grip of this philosophy.

"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh ; but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north ; it whirleth about continually ; and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea ; yet the sea is not full ; unto the place from whence the

rivers come, thither they return again. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be ; and that which is done is that which shall be done ; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, See, this is new ? It hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things, neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come, with those that shall come after" (I. 4-11).

This is a philosophy of despair, and is not influentially held in our time. But there is a modern theory, which is held almost universally by poets, politicians, philanthropists, and even by some of Christian profession. It is that there will be the

TRIUMPH OF THE GOOD OVER THE EVIL BY
HUMAN EVOLUTION

The Darwinian theory of evolution relates to the origin of man, but the evolutionary theory of history is, that in man are the intellectual and moral qualities, by which, under cultivation, he can advance from stage

to stage until he reaches the human goal.

This theory says that "Divinity is humanity raised to its nth power" ; that "the individual man is partly the animal from which he has come, and partly the God who is coming to Him." TENNYSON says :

"Move upward working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die."

But have long centuries of civilization accomplished this in us? Literature, Ethics, Politics, Philanthropy, Culture, Reform, Conferences, Federations, Leagues and Pacts, have these "worked out the beast, and made the ape and tiger die"? For answer we have only to think of the last war, and of the state of the world at the present time. Look at the far East, and Europe, and say if mankind is moving on to the goal of human perfection. The vast amount of good desire and intention in the world is rendered ineffectual by the baseness of human nature.

The evolutionary philosophy finds no place for the development of evil, but in our time we are witnessing such a manifestation

of it as should for ever shatter our dreamy hopes.

Now let us turn from these two theories of the world touching the course and goal of human history, to a consideration of the

II. Views of Christendom

by which expression let us understand the whole sphere of Christian profession.

Within this sphere there are just two theories of the course and goal of human history. The one that dominates teaches the

TRIUMPH OF THE GOOD BY THE DIFFUSION OF CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES

In this view the business of the Church is to Christianize society, to convert the world, to permeate the world meal with the Gospel leaven until the whole is leavened.

In this view the coming of Christ is invisible, spiritual, continuous, and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth is progressive until it is perfected. But we may well ask how long it will take to accomplish this at the present rate of progress.

It has been truly said that "our hope of the world's conversion is a dream, if religious progress is to be measured by that of the intervals between great religious awakenings of the popular heart."

The Church has no commission to convert the world. Her instructions are to evangelize mankind.

The Bible teaches the contemporaneous development of good and evil, and nowhere leads us to expect such an enlargement of the Church as shall embrace all nations.

The wheat and the darnel are to grow together until the harvest. Of this parable Archbishop TRENCH says : "We learn that evil is not, as so many dream, gradually to wane and disappear before good ; but is ever to develop itself more fully. Even as on the other side good is to unfold itself more and more, and more mightily also. Thus it will go on until at last they stand face to face, each in its highest manifestation in the persons of Christ and of Antichrist. Both are to grow, evil and good, till they come to a

head, till they are ripe, one for destruction, and the other for full salvation."

Dr. GODET is equally explicit when he says : "The Bible does not recognise any conversion of the pagan world between the time of the primitive Church and the epoch of the Parousia. It sees the abominations of idolatry lasting on to the end."

If then, good and evil are not eternally to co-exist ; and if man, by natural evolution, is not to accomplish his own perfection ; and if the world is not to be converted by the dissemination of Christian principles, what is the course of history, and how will it be consummated ? One alternative remains :

HUMAN FAILURE AND THE PERSONAL RETURN OF CHRIST TO JUDGE AND TO RULE

Of course we are not disposed to accept this alternative, because it is not flattering to human nature.

Those who hold that Christ will establish His Kingdom by the peaceable and gradual diffusion of His principles, rest upon the conception that the depths of wickedness

in man's sinful nature have been already fathomed ; that there are no lower depths, no new forms in which hostility to God and Christ can manifest itself.

But does this harmonise with the facts? Or are these ideas in keeping with the teaching of Scripture ?

The Bible knows nothing of the Golden Age of human development. On the contrary, it forecasts a steady decline, and a climax of rebellion against God.

In the Gentile Image there is depreciation from gold to silver, to brass, to iron, to clay ; and Paul, speaking by the Spirit, says: "Understand this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant; blasphemous, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, profane, without natural affection; implacable, slanderers, unrestrained, fierce, haters of the good, traitors, headstrong, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of Godliness, but they have denied the power of it."

That is not a flattering forecast, but, in all its essentials, is not that the course which men have taken ?

Scientific progress has been far in advance of moral progress ; and the present-hour passion for peace is far in advance of our desire for righteousness.

The ponderous machine of Civilization which man has brought into existence has got out of control, and so, near the middle of the 20th century we see all nations preparing for war.

What is the significance of the present hour ? Is the light we see the light of a glorious dawn that is beginning to illumine the heavens ? Or is it the lurid gleam of volcanic fires ?

Are the present sufferings of mankind birth-pangs, or death throes ? According to Scripture such an age as this will be terminated by a cataclysmic event—the return of Christ to judge and rule. Because He is the moral Governor of the universe, as well as the Redeemer of men, He must come,

and the Bible plainly declares that He will come. His coming will be a sad day for the sinner, but a wonderful day for the Christian.

For all whose trust is in Him, whose sins are under cover of His Blood, "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God ; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air ; and so shall we be ever with the Lord."

"Hark, hark, hear the glad tidings ;
Soon, soon, Jesus will come,
Robed, robed in honour and glory,
To gather His ransomed ones home.

"Joy, joy, sound it more loudly;
Sing, sing glory to God ;
Soon, soon, Jesus is coming,
Publish the tidings abroad."

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST

CHAPTER II

The Teaching of Christ

"I will come again" (John 14. 3).

WHATEVER we may think about Christ's views concerning the Last Things, there cannot at any rate be any misapprehension as to what they were.

His teaching, both parabolic and plain, speaks of a future "coming," as an event in history which will close one age and open another, and, having regard for Who Christ was, it will not do to speak of such teaching as though He held a private view of the course of events which is entitled to no more consideration than our opinions on the subject.

No theory of His "Self-emptying" can in the least invalidate His pronouncements on this or any other subject.

We must either receive the teaching of

Christ as infallibly true, or, we must reject His claims for Himself, and, by so doing, challenge the whole New Testament revelation. The present purpose is not to examine all that Christ said on the subject of His return, but to select a few important aspects of it, and hear Him speak on these.

First of all, then, let us consider

I. The Prediction of the Return

By parables and plain teaching Christ clearly declared that He would come back to this world.

It is difficult to understand how anyone who reads *the parables* with any care can doubt that the Lord will come again, for the message of several of them gathers around the period of His absence; with its necessary boundaries, His departure and His return, and with the denial of a second advent these parables lose their significance.

There is, for instance, the parable of "The Lord and his Servant" (Matt. 24. 45-51). In this, the servant says, "My lord delayeth his coming"; which idea implies that the

lord *went away*, and *is away*, and *intends to return*.

These ideas are found also in the parable of "The Bridegroom and the Virgins" (Matt. 25. 1-13). Here we read that "the bridegroom tarried," which clearly implies that he *went away*, and *intended to return*.

Then, there is the parable of "The Lord and the Talents." In this story the three particulars we are considering are set forth with the utmost clearness (Matt. 25. 14-30). The lord is "as a man travelling into a far country" (14). There is *the going*. "After a long time" (19); there is the *absence*: "the lord of those servants cometh (19); there, is *the return*."

To like purpose is the parable of "The Master of the House" (Mark. 13. 34-37). Here, Christ says that "the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey." That journey implies his absence; and Christ continues, "Ye know not when the master of the house cometh."

And there is also the parable of "The

Nobleman and the Pounds" (Luke 19. 12-27). Here, as in the parable of the Talents, "a certain nobleman went into a far country," there, is *the going* ; "to receive for himself a kingdom," there, is the purpose of *his absence* ; "and *to return*," there, is stated his intention to come back.

Of this intention the nobleman does not leave his servants in any doubt, for "he delivered to them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come."

The story goes on to say: "And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, he reckoned with his servants."

Quite incidentally these ideas are found also in the parable of "The Good Samaritan" (Luke 10. 30-35). Having helped the wounded man, we read that "on the morrow he departed" ; but before doing so he said to the innkeeper, "Take care of him, and . . . when I come again I will repay thee."

All these parables refer to Christ Himself. *He* is the *Lord*, and the *Bridegroom*, and the

Master of the House, and the Nobleman, and the Good Samaritan. And surely language could not state more plainly the triple fact that, *He who was here, went away, is now absent, and is pledged to come back again,* and the last of these facts is not less certain than the other two.

In the light of the evidence it would not be more unreasonable to deny that He ever went away, or that He is now absent, than it is to deny that He will come again.

One great object of the parables was to make the disciples understand that Christ was about to leave them, and that He would return, and the exhortation throughout to faithfulness and watchfulness loses its force if He is not to come back.

But in addition to these parables is *the plain teaching of Christ*. Twenty-one times, at least, He speaks of His second advent, and these references are made on the eve of His departure.

It was in the shadow of the Cross that He foretold His advent in glory. Here are some

of His words: "The Son of Man shall come." "They shall see the Son of Man coming." "Your Lord doth come." "When the Son of Man shall come." "When He cometh in the glory of His Father." "Ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord."

These declarations are made in terms which present shades of His meaning, terms which signify: To expose to view (*apokalupsis*) ; the act of coming (*erchomai*) ; presence, or arrival (*parousia*) ; and, to be here, to have come (*hēkō*).

In addition to all this, are such passages as refer to "the time of the harvest," "the end of the age," "the day," "that day," "the last day," "the regeneration," and "rewards."

Such references in Christ's teaching point almost always to that crisis which is marked by His second advent.

Alas, that there are any who do not hesitate to say that Christ was mistaken in His teaching on this subject, but, at any rate, no one can deny that He said He would come

again, and said so both before His death, and after His resurrection.

Now let us consider, for a moment, what Christ has to say on

II. The Manner of His Return

First of all, He tells us that it will be *Personal and Visible*.

His references to this subject are taken by many to mean that He is always coming ; and we are told that He came in A.D. 70, at the Fall of Jerusalem ; and again, when the massive fabric of Roman civilization fell before the attacks of Goths and Huns ; and again, at the birth of modern Europe in the 13th century ; and again, when Martin Luther shook and shattered the edifice of the Papacy, and brought reality back to religion ; and again, at the time of the Evangelical Revival, when Wesley and Whitefield aroused a torpid and dead England to spiritual life ; and again, in the time of the American Civil War.

Now, whatever may be said about these and other Divine visitations, by no fair hand-

ling of Scripture can they be in any way related to Christ's predictions of His second advent.

Referring to such interpretations, Dr. DENNEY has said: "But all these admissions, giving them the widest possible application, do not enable us to call in question what stands so plainly in the pages of the New Testament, what filled so exclusively the minds of the first Christians—the idea of a personal return of Christ at the end of the world. If we are to retain any relation to the New Testament at all, we must assert the personal return of Christ as Judge of all."

We do not deny that great crises in history may be regarded in some sense as a coming of Christ, nor do we deny that there is a coming which is spiritual and progressive. Christ teaches this quite plainly in the words: "I come again, and will receive you unto Myself" (John 14. 3, R.V.), not as in the A.V., "I will come again."

The R.V. includes the second advent, but embraces much more, as does verse 18

also, which likewise has the present and not the future tense: "I will not leave you orphans ; I come to you."

His coming in this latter verse cannot refer to His second advent, for that would mean that His people have been left orphans until now. Both verses 3 and 18 have a progressive meaning. Christ came again when He rose from the dead ; and also on the day of Pentecost. He has been coming to His people in many ways since then, and all these comings will be consummated when in person He will return from heaven at the end of the age.

We do not need to deny one truth in order to affirm another, so we must reject the teaching which denies Christ's personal and visible Coming on the ground that He is always coming.

Then, let it be said, Christ taught that *His Return will be Sudden*. In His Olivet discourse He employs three illustrations to set forth the suddenness and visibility of His advent. It will be "as *lightning* cometh

out of the east, and shineth even unto the west" (27).

It will be as the *flood* in the days of Noah, which came swiftly "and took them all away" (39), and it will be as the *thief* who is not expected to come (43).

These figures of the lightning, the flood, and the thief, cannot well be applied to any past coming, but, in their context, must refer to an advent yet future, which shall be personal, visible, and sudden.

But further, Christ taught that *His Return will be in Glory*. "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father, with His angels."

"The tribes of the earth shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

"When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory."

Such affirmations cannot leave one in any doubt as to the manner of the second advent.

It is said that for Christ to come again would be derogatory to His majesty ; but

surely the fact of a past coming should dispose us to expect a future one !

Surely He who once came in weakness, can and should come again in power. Surely He who once came to suffer, can and should come again to reign ! Surely He who once came in humiliation, can and should come again in glory ! And surely this earth, which was once the scene of His apparent defeat, should some day be the scene also of His unquestioned triumph !

If 1900 years ago it was not derogatory to His majesty to become incarnate, to be born in a stable and to work at a carpenter's bench, to die on a Cross and to be buried in a borrowed tomb, how would it be derogatory to His majesty to come with flaming advent feet, to come with shining hosts of angels, to come with regal authority and power, to come to judge and rule the world ?

“Lo, He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain ;
Thousand, thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of His train ;
Hallelujah !
Jesus comes, and comes to reign.”

But those who are convinced of all this, are ever asking about

III. The Time of the Return

As to this, Christ's teaching is clear. It may be summarised in three statements:

FIRST, that the period of His absence would be protracted.

SECOND, that certain signs would herald the approach of His advent ; and

THIRD, that the precise time of His coming could not be known.

I. That the period of His absence would be protracted is intimated in the parable of the Talents, where it is said, "After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh:" in the parable of the Pounds, where it is said that the nobleman went into a far country "to receive for Himself a kingdom," a mission which would require time ; and in that passage which speaks of wars, and rumours of wars, of nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom ; of famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, and all of these as being "the beginning of sorrows" ;

and in that passage also, which says that "the Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come."

2. Also, Christ intimated that certain signs would herald the imminence of His second advent : the rise of false prophets, strange happenings in the physical and moral worlds, and the revival of a national consciousness among the Jews.

3. But He plainly taught that no one could know just when He would come.

"Ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

"In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh."

"Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels that are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."

"Ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning."

When Christ said : "There be some standing here who shall not taste of death, till

they shall see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom," the context makes it clear that He was referring to the Transfiguration, which took place a week later (Matt. 16. 28 ; 17. 1).

A more difficult passage is Matt. 24. 34: "This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled."

Now, as the "things" referred to in the preceding context did not occur before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, our Lord cannot be pointing to that event ; and that He did not mean that the people to whom He was talking, that "generation," would be alive when He returned again from Heaven, is evident in the fact that He has not yet come.

The passage, however, must mean something, and it has been influentially held that "generation" here means "race," and that what is affirmed is that the Jewish race would be preserved till the second advent.

If this be the meaning, the promise has been wonderfully fulfilled. But the passage may also mean, not the generation *to* which,

but *of* which Christ was speaking, which would cast it into the future. In any case, should we all fail satisfactorily to explain the passage, that would in no way invalidate what, of Christ's teaching, is perfectly clear. He did not speak ignorantly, and He did not contradict Himself.

But what, it may be asked, will be

IV. The Purpose of the Return?

Here also Christ's teaching is plain. He will come to "reckon" with men ; to *judge*, to *reward*, and to *rule*.

In the Talents parable the Lord returned, "and reckoned with" his servants.

In the time of the harvest the darnel is separated from the wheat. At the end of the age the good fish are gathered into vessels, and the bad cast away ; that is, "the wicked are severed from amongst the just" (Matt. 13. 47-49).

There is a profound ethical and spiritual reason for all the Divine actions ; they are rooted in God's holy character, and in the necessity of things.

The Apostles' Creed says, He shall return "to judge the quick and the dead."

"There is an inherent fitness," says Dr. ORR, "if not a moral necessity, about such a return of Christ, at the end of the world, as the New Testament uniformly asserts."

That fitness is found in the necessity for judgment, a necessity which is witnessed to alike by the human conscience (Rom. 2. 15), man's sense of justice (Acts 24. 25), the declarations of Scripture (Heb. 9. 27), and the nature of God (Gen. 18. 25).

No one will claim that thus far in human history justice has been done in this world to either the good or the evil. This fact has been an age-long moral problem, and the Psalmist gave expression to an universal experience when he said: "As for me, my feet were almost gone : my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency" (Psa. 73).

But God, being what He is, wickedness

must be punished, and righteousness must be rewarded. That this, in a sense, is being done all the time, in no wise affects the fact of, nor alters the necessity for a future final judgment.

“God hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained : whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.” There is an end, a goal for creation, a purpose to be fulfilled, a will to be accomplished.

“History is not an aimless succession of changes. . . . By the revelation of the final Judgment we are enabled to see that for mankind, as for men severally, there is an appointed close to earthly work ” (Westcott).

All the currents of human history are setting in to the Judgment. All generations of men (out of Christ) are moving on to the Great White Throne and the infallible justice of that judgment is guaranteed by the fact that Christ will be the Judge,

"He shall come to judge," whose are majesty, authority, knowledge, justice, and power, and Who is also Love.

From His verdict there shall be no appeal, for His own character is the criterion of judgment.

The Husbandman shall thoroughly purge His floor.

The Householder shall bind the tares in bundles for the fire.

The Fisherman shall cast away that which is bad.

The Bridegroom shall shut the door upon the foolish.

The Shepherd shall separate the sheep from the goats.

The Nobleman shall consign the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.

The Judge of all the earth shall do right.

When Christ shall come from heaven to earth to judge the quick and the dead, we do not know, but that He will do so is a revealed fact, and a moral necessity. This purpose is a constant warning to the ungodly, and a

constant encouragement to the believer. God has said to wickedness, as to the waves of the sea, "so far shalt thou go, and no further."

"As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark ; and knew not, until the flood came, and took them all away. . . . so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

"The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels ; and then He shall reward every man according to his works." And so

V. The Call of the Return

is to *watchfulness* and *faithfulness*. *Indifference* and *indolence* are the sins that will be judged. It is utterly perilous to *disbelieve* or *forget* that Christ is coming again, and to leave unfulfilled the task for the accomplishment of which He sent us into the world.

In Christ's teaching watchfulness ever implies the danger of indolence, or neglect of

duty. "The last day is hidden," says AUGUSTINE, "that every day may be regarded."

Watchfulness does not mean a lazy gazing up into heaven, but will express itself in an earnest performance of duty.

A lady once asked JOHN WESLEY: "Suppose you knew that you were to die at twelve o'clock to-morrow night, how would you spend the intervening time?"

"How? madam," he replied; "why, just as I intend to spend it now. I should preach this night at Gloucester, and again at five to-morrow morning. After that I should ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the Societies in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin's house, who expects to entertain me, converse and pray with the family as usual, retire to my room at ten o'clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in glory."

Christ has given to every man his work, and there is noⁿ preparation for His coming like the faithful doing of the appointed task.

But what about you who are not Christians at all, and who, if Christ were to come now, would be exposed to His righteous judgment? In that day there shall be no escape for those who have neglected God's great salvation. Therefore, "To-day, if ye will hear His voice harden not your heart." "Now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation."

"YET THERE IS ROOM"

"The Lamb's bright hall of song,
With its fair glory, beckons thee along.
Day is declining, and the sun is low ;
The shadows lengthen, light makes haste to go.
The Bridal hall is filling for the feast ;
Pass in ! pass in ! and be the Bridegroom's guest.

"Yet there is room !" Still open stands the gate—
The gate of love : it is not yet too late.
Louder and sweeter sounds the loving call :
Come, lingerer, come ! Enter that festal hall.
Ere night that gate may close, and seal thy doom :
Then the last, loud cry, "No room !" "No room !"

Room, room, still room !
Oh enter, enter now.

THE WITNESS OF THE APOSTLES

CHAPTER III

The Witness of the Apostles

"He that shall come will come,
and will not tarry" (Heb. 10: 37).

THE Letters of the New Testament are based upon the Gospel Records ; that is to say, the teaching of the Apostles has its source in the teaching of Jesus Christ.

There are some who exhort us to get back from the theological abstrusities of the Apostles to the "simplicity that is in Christ Jesus" ; which implies that Apostolic teaching has not authority, that it is human intellectualism and not Divine revelation ; and, as supposed evidence of this, we are told that Paul changed his views on the subject of the Second Advent ; that what dominated his early Epistles almost disappears in the later ones.

Now the facts of the case are against both these positions. No distinct Christian doc-

trine was a product of Jewish theology ; that is, Christianity was not a development of Judaism, but something startlingly new ; new not merely in form, but in conception. Rabbinical teaching and the Christian Faith lie far enough apart.

All the tenets of the Faith are not given equal prominence in the New Testament. The fact and truth of Christ's death and resurrection dominates the Apostolic Writings, but there is no indisputable reference in them to the Virgin Birth. On the other hand, the second advent of Christ is given great prominence, and lights up the whole horizon of the New Testament, being found in almost every Epistle, as well as in the "Acts" and the "Revelation." So true is this that Dr. DENNEY has said it "filled exclusively the minds of the first Christians," and this very fact is often used to discount the hope which, it is said, did not eventuate.

The dates of some of the Epistles cannot be given with precision, but an approximate date will suffice for the present purpose.

Let us take the Letters in what would appear to be their chronological order, and see what their witness is to the idea that Christ will come again.

In the decade 40-50 A.D., we must place the Epistle of James, in which we read: "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until he receive the early and later rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (Ch. 5. 7, 8).

The word *parousia*, used here, and often of Christ's return, means *presence*, and has the same significance as when used of the *coming* of Stephanas, or Titus, or Paul (1 Cor. 16, 17; 2 Cor. 7. 6; Phil. 1. 26).

From this passage we learn that within twenty years of the ascension of Christ it was assumed by Christians that He would return, and it was believed that His coming was "at hand."

In the decade 50-60 A.D., fall six of Paul's

Epistles. The first two of these, 1-2 Thessalonians, are dominated by the belief that the Lord Who had gone would return. In the two Epistles are eight chapters, and the second advent is referred to in each of them, directly or indirectly (1 Thess. 1. 9, 10 ; 2. 19 ; 3. 13 ; 4. 13-18 ; 5. 1-4, 23 ; 2 Thess. 1. 6, 7, 10 ; 2. 2, 3, 8).

His advent, we are told, will be a *descent* (1 Thess. 4. 16), a *coming* (1 Thess. 2. 19, *et al.*), a *revealing* (2 Thess. 1. 7), the *Day of the Lord* (1 Thess. 5. 2, *et al.*) all of which terms point to a cataclysmic event. And it is in 1 Thessalonians that we have the revelation of Christ's advent to the *air*, which should be distinguished from His advent to the *earth*. It is in that notable and eloquent passage which is read at every funeral service:

"But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep ; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with

Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first ; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Whether the reference in verse 15 be to a lost saying of the Lord's, or to a revelation vouchsafed to the Apostle, the truth is here for the first time presented, and is not affected by whether we believe it, or disbelieve it.

It would appear that this event, which is frequently referred to as the *Day of Christ*, must be distinguished from the *Day of the Lord* of 1 Thess. 5. 2 ; 2 Thess. 2. 2. R.V. The latter expression comes from the Old

Testament, and relates to Christ's universal Kingdom ; but the former expression is found in the New Testament only, and relates to His advent for the Church.

Four years later than the Thessalonian Letters are the two to Corinth, and the references here to the Lord's return, though not so numerous, are quite unmistakable.

Paul says that the Corinthians were "waiting for the coming" (*apokalupsis*, unveiling) of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1. 7), an event which is spoken of as an act (1 Cor. 1. 5, *erchomai*) issuing in His presence with His people (1 Cor. 15. 23, *parousia*).

Of 1 Cor. 13. 10, "when that which is perfect shall come," GODET says : "The aorist alludes to a fixed and positively expected moment, which can be no other than that of the advent."

This return of the Lord crowns redemption truth ; for, says Paul, "As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. 11. 26).

Here the past, the present, and the future are surveyed: the Lord's death, the Christian Church, and the second advent—the first promoting faith, the second love, and the third hope. Thus are the Cross, the Communion, and the Crown seen to embrace the Christian revelation.

In Galatians and Romans also, which belong to the same decade, are references to Christ's return. In Galatians 5. 5, "faith waiting for the hope of righteousness," almost certainly refers to the expectation of the coming of the Lord, as in 1 Corinthians 1. 7 ; Philippians 3. 20 ; Hebrews 9. 28; and in Romans 13. 11, 12, to the same purpose is the reference to "Salvation being nearer than when we first believed," and to "the night being far spent, and the day being at hand."

To the decade 60-70 A.D., belong the "Acts" and eleven Epistles ; one from Jude, two from Peter, seven from Paul, and the Letter to the Hebrews, and in *Philemon* only is there no reference to the second advent.

Taking these in the approximate order of

writing, there is an interesting, though a somewhat obscure passage in Ephesians 1. 12-14. It reads : "That we should be to the praise of His glory, we who had (or have) before hoped in Christ" ; and it ends with a reference to "the redemption of God's own possession."

Commenting on this passage, the late Bishop of Durham, Dr. HANDLEY MOULE, says : "The '*beforehand*' has regard to His (Christ's) second coming, when we 'shall appear with Him in glory.'" And of the same passage Bishop WESTCOTT says : "'Beforehand' (*proelpizein*) occurs here only in the New Testament. The *pro* is limited not by the belief of the Ephesian Gentiles ('believed before you') but by the Advent ('believe before Christ actually came')."

These verses, together with chapter 4. 30, evidently refer to the second coming of Christ, for "the day of our redemption" cannot mean the time of the Christian's decease.

In Colossians 3. 4, we read : "When Christ,

Who is your life, shall be manifested (*phane-roō*), then shall ye also with Him be manifested in glory."

The word here used means "to make visible," as in Mark 4. 22, "there is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested," and it is used in other Scriptures of the advent, as we shall see.

In Philippians there is an unmistakable reference in chapter 3. 20, 21: "For our citizenship is in heaven; *whence also we wait for a Saviour*, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself."

Of chapter 4. 1, Dr. HANDLEY MOULE says: "Here he (Paul) is looking forward to the Lord's return, and to a joyful recognition of his converts then." And of chapter 4. 5: "The deeply calming thought of the Lord's return may well be latent in the words, 'The Lord is at hand.'"

In the two Epistles of Peter, especially in the second, the hope of the Advent is bright and solemn.

“The trial of our faith is to be found unto praise and glory and honour at the *revelation* (*apokalupsis*) of Jesus Christ.”

We are exhorted to “gird up the loins of our mind, to be sober and hope perfectly for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation (*apokalupsis*) of Jesus Christ ;” and we are bidden “rejoice inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, that at the revelation (*apokalupsis*) of His glory also we may rejoice with exceeding joy.”

The Apostle also cheers the suffering saints with the assurance that “when the Chief Shepherd shall appear (*phaneroō*, be made visible) they shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

In Peter’s Second Epistle is a long passage on the subject of the Return, in which we are bidden “look for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God.”

Also in Jude we read that “Enoch, the

seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh (*erchomai*) with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment."

The writer to the Hebrews is also quite explicit: "Christ, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear (*ophthēsetai*, shall be seen) a second time, apart from sin, unto salvation."

"Blessed assurance," says Prof. A. T. ROBERTSON, "of the second coming of Christ," but this time "apart from sin."

And in chapter 10. 37, we read: "He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry." This passage is specially important because of its threefold emphasis: "He that cometh (*Ho erchomenos*) shall arrive (*hēxei*, the word which is used in Luke 15. 27, "thy brother is come"), and shall not linger (*chōmīsei*, the word used in Luke 1. 21, of Zacharias lingering in the temple)." There is no room here for the idea of a progressive spiritual coming, nor indeed, in any of the foregoing passages.

And now, in this decade, there remain the last three Letters of the Apostle Paul, sometimes called the Pastoral Epistles. It has been said that he changed his mind on the subject of a second advent, and dropped it out of his teaching at the end.

This, however, is not the case, for there are references to the advent, emphatic and radiant, in each of these Epistles.

In 1 Timothy he exhorts : "That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, *until* the appearing (*mechri tēs epiphaneias*, up to the time of the manifestation) of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"This adverb of time implies," says Dr. BULLINGER, "that the action there terminates : enduring up to a certain point of time, and then, an end."

Equally plain is the passage in Titus 2. 11-13 : "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world ; looking for

the blessed hope of the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

This is a very important reference. The word "appeared" (*epephanē*) in verse 11, refers to Christ's first advent, and in verse 13, it refers to His return (cf., 2 Tim. 1. 10).

In 2 Thessalonians 2. 8, we read that Christ will destroy the "lawless one . . . by the manifestation of His coming," where both *epiphaneia* and *parousias* are used, and signify His personal visibility. It is thus clearly taught that His second advent will be as His first in visible reality, though so different in other respects.

And now we come to Paul's last Letter, written, probably, about 67 or 68 A.D., in which, with full consciousness of impending death, he reveals his heart in all its strength and tenderness. The things he speaks of at such a time are things very dear to him, because they belong to his deepest convictions. According to some, the note of Christ's return gradually dropped out of the music of Paul's teaching, and at last was silent.

But let us hear him : "I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, Who shall judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing (*epiphaneian*), and His Kingdom, preach the Word." "I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me *at that day* ; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved His appearing (*epiphaneian*)."

With almost his last breath the Apostle bore witness to his faith in the hope of Christ's personal return to reward and to judge.

Turning now to the book of the "Acts," which records the preaching of the Apostles, as the Epistles record their teaching, and which covers the first generation of the Church's history, 30-63, A.D., we find that the second advent was a note in their message.

There is, first of all, the word of the angels at the time of the Lord's ascension : "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven ? This Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come (*erchomai*) in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven."

Nothing could be more emphatic than this. It is "this Jesus" Who went up that is to come again, and He will come "so in like manner" as He was seen to go. How did He go ? Personally. Then He will come personally. How did He go ? Suddenly. Then He will come suddenly. How did He go ? Visibly. Then He will come visibly. How did He go ? Bodily. Then He will come bodily. How did He go ? From earth to heaven. Then He will come from heaven to earth. How did He go ? With clouds. Then He will come with clouds. How did He go ? In power and glory. Then He will come in power and glory.

And another impressive passage is in chapter 3. 19-21 : "Repent ye therefore, and

turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord ; and that He may send (*aposteilē*) the Christ Who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus : Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets that have been from of old."

The two words of importance here, for our purpose, are "shall send," and "until." Of these, Dr. KNOWLING says : "The context certainly conceives of Christ as enthroned in heaven where He must remain until His second advent." And of the preposition of time (*achri*), Dr. BULLINGER says, "it fixes attention on the whole duration up to a certain time, but leaves the further continuance undetermined." The meaning of the word is well illustrated by Matthew 24. 38 : "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, *until* the day that Noah entered into the ark."

If language has any significance these

words mean that a time shall come when Christ will return from the heaven into which He ascended, and for the purpose which was Israel's hope and the prophet's theme.

Another important passage is in chapter 15. 13-18 : "And after they had held their peace, James answered saying, Brethren, hearken unto me : Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His Name. And to this agree the words of the prophets ; as it is written, After these things I will return, and I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up : that the residue of men may seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My Name is called, saith the Lord, Who maketh these things known from of old."

The relevant phrase is, "After those things I will return" (16, *anastrepsō*). The meaning of this word may be gathered from chapter 5. 22, where we read : "The officers came,

found them not in the prison ; and they *returned* and told . . .”

Of these verses (13-18), Dr. C. I. SCOFIELD says : “Dispensationally, this is the most important passage in the New Testament. It gives the Divine purpose for this age, and for the beginning of the next.”

The Church is the subject of verse 14, and Israel the subject of verses 16, 17 ; and between the two is Christ's second advent, closing the one age, and opening the other.

By this passage the distinction is sharply drawn between the Christian Church and the Messianic Kingdom, and that which historically connects them is Christ's second coming. As a commentary on this passage read carefully the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

But there is one further testimony, that of the Apostle John, who wrote in the last decade of the first century of this era. In the “Gospel” he has three references to what Christ said about a second advent (14. 3, 28 ; 21. 22, 23), but lest any should think

that these references point to, or only to His resurrection, Pentecost, and A.D. 70, let us turn to John's Epistles, in two of which he teaches that Christ will come again.

In 1 John 2. 28, he says : "And now, little children, abide in Him, that if He shall be manifested (*phanerōthē*, become outwardly evident), we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming(*parousia*)."

Commenting on this passage, Dr. PLUMMER says : "In inferior authorities the more difficult *ean* ('if') has been softened into *hotan* ('when'). 'If' seems to imply a doubt as to Christ's return, and the change to 'when' has probably been made to avoid this. But 'if' implies no doubt as to the *fact*, it merely implies indifference as to the *time* ; 'if He should return in our day.'"

And of the word "coming," the same writer says : "In the New Testament it is almost a technical term to express Christ's return to judgment." And of its occurring here only, in John's Writings, he quotes Bishop WESTCOTT. The single occurrence

of the word here, "where it might easily have been omitted, in exactly the same sense as it bears in all the other groups of Apostolic Writings, is a signal example of the danger of drawing conclusions from the negative phenomena of the books of the New Testament. The fact is the more worthy of notice as the subject of eschatology falls into the background in the Gospel and Epistles of St. John."

There is no need to add anything to this testimony, except the two other passages which confirm it.

In 1 John 3. 2, 3, we read : "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest (*ephanerōthē*) what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested (*phanerōthē*) we shall be like Him ; for we shall see (*opsometha*, to look upon ; cf. John 19. 37) Him even as He is."

And in 2 John 7 : "Many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh (*erchomenon*) in the flesh."

Of this passage FAUSSET says : "I think 'coming' implies both the first and the second advent of Christ. He is often elsewhere called '*Ho Erchomenos*,' the Coming One. The denial of the reality of His incarnation at His first coming, and of His personal advent again, constitutes Antichrist."

Finally, there is the witness of the "Revelation," which is full of the subject of Christ's return.

"Behold, He cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him : and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen."

"But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come."

"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all

the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly ; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

"And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in Thy sickle, and reap : for the time is come for thee to reap ; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth ; and the earth was reaped."

"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

"Behold, I come quickly : blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And, behold, I come quickly ; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these

things in the churches. I am the Root and Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Surely no one, after surveying all this testimony, can doubt that the Apostles and early Church believed that Christ would come back in person, or deny the validity of their belief!

If it be objected that they believed Christ would return in their time, and He did not, let it be said that their hope and attitude were true. Christ had said that no one knew when He would return, so that their generation might have witnessed the event as well as any other generation. Had it been known then that Christ would not return for nineteen hundred years, the expectation of Christians would have been destroyed for

that period ; but our Lord enjoined upon all generations a spirit of watchfulness and faithfulness. The truth that Christ will come again is not invalidated by the fact that He did not come in the apostolic age, and has not come yet.

Our calendar is not His, and what is slow to us, is swift to Him ; but the promise stands, and it will be fulfilled.

This, then, is the hope set before us. All things cosmical, whether they be things celestial or things terrestrial, are moving on in irresistible might to the consummation infinitely glorious.

This progression of the ages no power can stay. In its unfolding is to be disclosed the final cause of redemption.

“The world is very evil ;
The times are waxing late ;
Be sober and keep vigil,
The Judge is at the gate—
The Judge that comes in mercy,
The Judge that comes with might,
To terminate the evil,
To diadem the right.”

"There is no roof in all the world, of palace or of cot,
That hideth not some burdened heart, nigh breaking
for its lot :

The earth is sunk in pain and tears, and closer draws
the gloom ;

And balm for cure there can be none, till Christ, the
Lord shall come.

"My Saviour Who doth know the thirst the longing
spirit feels—

O Bridegroom now so long afar, why stay Thy
chariot wheels ?

Were ever eyes so dim with grief, breasts so op-
pressed with care ?

Did ever hearts so yearn to catch Thy whisper from
the air ?

"Thou lonely one lift up thy head, array thee for the
feast ;

He that hath tarried long is near—the glow is in the
East !"

O Morning Star so soon to lead Thy chosen ones away ;

O Sun of Righteousness bring in the everlasting day."

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

CHAPTER IV

The Signs of the Times

"Can ye not discern the signs of the times?"

(Matthew 16. 1-3).

NO aspect of the subject of the Lord's return is more difficult to deal with than that which relates to the "signs," which, it is predicted, will precede that event. Dogmatic fancies have done not a little to bring the truth into ill-repute, and hopes falsely founded have often led to wild extravagance of word and deed.

If there are no predicted "signs" of this event, certainly we should not look for any; but if "signs" have been promised, we should know what they are, and learn to discern them when they appear.

Great periods in history often, if not always, have been preceded or accompanied by signs. When religionists came to Jesus and asked Him to show them a sign from heaven which would authenticate His

claims and justify His words and ways, He replied : "When it is evening ye say, it will be fair weather : for the heaven is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day for the heaven is red and lowering. Ye know how to discern the face of the heaven ; but ye cannot discern the *signs of the times*. An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall be no sign given unto it, but the sign of Jonah."

As the motive of these men was malicious the Lord declined to give them a sign. But when, on another occasion, after Jesus had foretold the destruction of the Temple, His disciples came to Him and asked : "Tell us, when shall these things be ? and what shall be the *sign* of Thy coming, and of the consummation of the age ?," He answered them in one of the longest of His recorded discourses, a pronouncement of incomparable importance touching future events (Matt. 24. 25).

Quite clearly, then, our Lord declared that certain "signs" would herald and accompany

His second advent, and He also intimated what these would be.

Into the consideration of this subject it must be admitted that at time irrelevances, exaggerations, and miscalculations have been introduced, but that does not invalidate the truth, nor should it turn us aside from a sober contemplation of what is revealed.

For our present purpose let me name and comment on five "signs" which the New Testament relates to "the last days."

Consider first of all the sign of

I. Widespread Apostasy

Writing to the Thessalonians on this subject, Paul says : "Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him ; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand. Let no man beguile you in any wise : for it will not be, except the *falling*

away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

This word "falling away" (*apostasia*) is our word "*apostasy*," and it occurs again only once, in Acts 21. 21, where it is translated "*forsake*." A related word, *apostasion*, occurs in the New Testament three times, and is translated "*divorcement*." From these passages we see that the word means *to forsake, to revolt, to desert, to depart from*, and so implies a profession or position which has been abandoned (*stasis*).

It is of great importance to apprehend this, because it shows that the word applies, not to the world, but to the professing Church. The world has nothing to apostatize from, but the Church has.

Now, the passage in Thessalonians says that before "the Day of the Lord," a phrase which refers to His second coming, there will be apostasy in the sphere of Christian profession: there will be defection, and desertion of beliefs once confessed, and of standards once acknowledged.

That this "sign" has appeared is too evident to need arguing. The rationalistic Higher Criticism movement of the nineteenth century, with Modernism, its product in the twentieth century, are proof enough of apostasy.

Significant of the present widespread attitude towards the Bible among people who profess to be Christians is the volume with the title "Doctrine in the Church of England," which was recently published, and which in substance implies that tenets of the Faith which once were regarded as facts of revelation, history, and experience, are now regarded only as matters of opinion.

To such an extent has infidelity pervaded Christendom that the professional infidel has disappeared. Present day religious literature, sermons and teaching in theological colleges are saturated with modernism, and modernism is not Christianity at all.

Let me make two quotations from a book just published on "Prophecy," by Dr. CHARLES TRUMBULL.* He reports the fol-

* "Prophecy's Light on To-day," pp. 91, 96.

lowing, which appeared in *The Christian Century* of Chicago, in January, 1924 : "How deep-going," asks the writer, "is the Fundamentalism-Modernist controversy? Is it an issue worth serious attention? . . . Is not the whole controversy, after all, scarcely more than a tempest in a teapot? Or are the Fundamentalists right in claiming that the issue is a grave one, going to the roots of religious conviction and involving the basic purposes and almost the genius of Christianity itself? A candid reply to such inquiries must be one of agreement with the Fundamentalist claim. . . . Christianity according to Fundamentalism is one religion. Christianity according to Modernism, is another religion. . . . For the day of neutrality has all but passed.

"There is a clash here as profound and as grim as that between Christianity and Confucianism. Amiable words cannot hide the differences. 'Blest be the tie' may be sung until doomsday, but it cannot bind these two worlds together.

"The God of the Fundamentalist is one

God ; the God of the Modernist is another. The Christ of the Fundamentalist is one Christ ; the Christ of Modernism is another. The Bible of Fundamentalism is one Bible ; the Bible of Modernism is another.”

The other quotation is from the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, which has declared:

“Much as we dislike Modernists because of their illogical compromising, we must recognise that, for many, Modernism is but a step-over on the road to Atheism. Perhaps we should have a little more patience with these our weaker brothers, who are unable to go straight from orthodoxy to atheism without resting at the camps of liberalism along the way. Modernism being no abiding place for the reasoning mind, some of them will yet arrive.”

It would be easy to give many illustrations in proof of what we are saying, namely, that Modernism is the great Apostasy and that it is here now. If, as many think, the Letters to the Asian Churches, in the Book of the

Revelation, present prophetically the course of the professing Church throughout this dispensation, then, surely, we have reached the Laodicean state of tepidity, "neither hot nor cold," but "miserable and poor and blind and naked."

I am not saying that the professing Church as a whole has become Modernist, but that Modernism is in it influentially, and is spreading. This is apostasy, because it is a denial of the authority of the Bible and of the Deity of Christ.

Another sign of the approaching return of the Lord is the present-day

II. Antagonism to Christianity

"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

Of course Christianity has been opposed from the beginning, but there is a difference between the antagonism of avowed paganism in the past, and the opposition which is being

shown to-day in countries which, in some form, professed the Christian Faith, and where religion falls within the scope of Christendom.

For illustration, take Communism in Russia, and National Socialism in Germany. *Russian Communism* is not only anti-Christian, but also anti-God. Lenin said that, "All religious ideas are an unspeakable abomination," and Prof. JOAD, in his survey of this aspect of Communism, concludes : "Religion, then, from the Communist point of view, is a gigantic deception."* And so, as one paper reports : "Russian children wear blasphemous pictures of Christ in cheap shoes, and carry clubs picturing Christ as a demon. The stories display pictures of Christ below which is written, ' See me as I am,' and on the other side is a picture of the Devil."

The attempt to exterminate in Russia all semblance of religion has been and is systematic. Many thousands have been murdered, and many thousands more have been and are enslaved.

* "Philosophy of Morals and Politics," p. 673.

In like manner National Socialism, or Nazi-ism, the enemy of Communism, is vigorously opposed to Christianity.

Christianity believes in human equality ; that each human soul is an end in itself and should be treated as such ; that all races are of equal worth in the sight of God ; and that the attainment of virtue is the end of life.

National Socialism denies all this.

Christianity preaches kindness and humility, and exhorts us to meet evil, not with a contrary evil, but with good. Also, it proclaims that the truth is absolute, and it denounces war.

National Socialism is opposed to all this.

"In March, 1934, the German Nazi Church issued a Catechism from which the following is an extract : ' The German has his own religion, which springs living from his own special observation, sentiment, and thought. We call it the German or German-racial religion, and by that we mean the peculiar and natural German faith in the nation. . . . The German of to-day needs a healthy and

natural religion which makes him brave, pious, and strong in the fight for folk and Fatherland. The German religion is such a creed. . . . Christianity is not such a creed ; on the contrary, it is rather the type of an unhealthy and unnatural final religion."

The extract could be paralleled by innumerable quotations of a similar tendency. It is not in Jesus Christ that the modern Nazi believes, but (I quote from the articles of faith contained in the "Bible" of the German Faith Movement) "in the German, God's other beloved Son." As the German Confessional Church, in a manifesto protesting against a policy on the part of the State which seeks to substitute "neo-paganism" for Christianity, sadly remarks : "There are many to-day who declare that one need only seek God in nation, in race, in the community and in blood. That places the creature above the Creator."*

Any form of Government which denies the worth and rights of the individual, and makes him "as an expression of the State's

*Prof. Joad, *ibid.* pp. 641-2

will, as a drop of blood in an ocean of racial purity, as a cog in a proletarian machine, as a unit in an industrial ant-state" is radically anti-Christian, for, to quote Prof. JOAD again, "the announcement of the importance of the individual is the great gift of Christianity to the world" (p. 13).

Communism, Nazi-ism, and with differences, Fascism, on this account are all antagonistic to Christianity.

The following is Prof. JOAD's account of the attitude of Fascism (and it is true also of Nazi-ism and Communism) to Christian ethics:

"The repudiation of freewill and the morality of motive culminates in an attack on Christianity and in particular on the Christian virtues. Conscience is not the voice of God : it is a feeling of guilt arising in the soul which has the courage to flout but not to despise the prejudices of the herd. Humility and meekness are virtues appropriate to slaves ; pity is the offspring of cowardice, for 'greatest of almsgivers is

cowardice.' All those who are not sufficiently master of themselves and do not regard morality as a self-control and self-conquest continuously exercised in things great and small, unconsciously come to glorify the good, compassionate, benevolent impulses of that instinctive morality which has no head, but seems merely to consist of a heart and helpful hands."

Kindness, helpfulness, and benevolence are, in other words, signs of weakness. Christianity, in fact, is little more than an organised conspiracy to put a premium upon weakness. Christianity is the religion of the inefficient and the cowardly ; it assures the failures of this life that they will succeed in the next ; the miserable, that they will be happy ; the lonely, comforted ; and the poor, wealthy with a wealth more valuable than earthly riches. At the manly virtues of independence, boldness, pride, and self-assertion it calls "sour grapes," assuring the herd who lack them that their possessor is displeasing to God.

Finally, it offers the bribe of eternal life, to comfort many for their inferiority, assuring them that in virtue of their possession of immortal souls they are "ends in themselves," and that as "ends" they are the equals in the eyes of God of the mighty, the proud and the powerful. "That everybody as an 'immortal soul,'" NIETZSCHE writes, "should have equal rank, that in the totality of beings the 'salvation' of each individual may lay claim to eternal importance, that insignificant bigots and three-quarter-lunatics may have the right to suppose that the laws of nature may be persistently broken on their account—any such magnification of every kind of selfishness to infinity, to insolence, cannot be branded with sufficient contempt. And yet it is to this miserable flattery of personal vanity that Christianity owes its triumph; by this means it lured all the bungled and the blotched, all revolting and revolted people, all abortions, the whole of the refuse and offal of humanity, over to its side. The 'salvation of the soul'—in plain English,

the world revolves around me" (pp.630-1).

Enough has been said to show that in our time a more formidable and widespread direct attack on Christianity is being made than ever before, an attack by Governments which represent a large proportion of the human race.

Another predicted sign of the approaching advent of the Lord is an universal

III. Spread of Lawlessness

"This know," says the Apostle Paul, "that in the last days grievous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."

And in another passage he predicts that on the eve of Christ's return the Antichrist will be revealed, who is the Lawless One.

"For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the

way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming ; even Him, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish ; because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved."

That this spirit of lawlessness is abroad no one can doubt. It is exhibited in contempt of the past, in impatience of all restraint and discipline, and in defiance of the established order of things. Political and commercial graft are widespread, and, to an extent which it is difficult to realise, the very foundations of morality are being attacked.

Again let it be said, there has always been lawlessness in the world ; but the predicted "signs" of the approaching return of Christ are not *new* phenomena, but the accentuation and spread of evils that have always been present.

In illustration of this, one need only point to the present-day flouting of international law, and the utter disregard of the rights of minorities, even to their own personal possessions. Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, Japan's invasion of China, and Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia are evidence sufficient of this contempt of justice on the part of so-called civilized peoples, and apparently there is not enough moral sense and power in the world to arrest the progress of this blight of lawlessness.

The dictatorships of to-day are definitely and directly preparing for the Antichrist, that man who "will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped," so that he will proclaim himself to be God.

Another predicted "sign" of Christ's near return is the revival of

IV. Jewish Nationalism

The Jew is in the foreground of world affairs to-day, and is fast becoming a major political issue. Old Testament predictions

of the gathering of this people are on the same level of value as the prophecies of their scattering.

Long before the event, the Spirit declared through Moses and Jeremiah, what would be the result of the apostasy of Israel.

“Jehovah will scatter thee among all peoples, from the one end of the earth even into the other end of the earth ; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy foot ; but Jehovah will give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and pining of soul, and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee ; and thou shalt fear night and day, and shalt have no assurance of thy life. In the morning thou shalt say, Would it were even ! and at even thou shalt say, Would it were morning ! for the fear of thy heart which thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see” (Deut. 28. 64-67).

"I will even give them up to be tossed to and fro among all the kingdoms of the earth for evil ; to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them" (Jer. 24. 9).

"Behold I will send and take all the families of the north, saith Jehovah, and I will send unto Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about ; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations" (Jer. 25. 9).

That these predictions have been tragically fulfilled is too evident to need further reference. But through Moses and Jeremiah and others, it is prophesied with equal plainness that this "scattered and peeled" people will be gathered again, will once again become a nation, and will again possess their land.

"Therefore fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith Jehovah ; neither be dismayed,

O Israel : for lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity ; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to save thee : for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, but I will not make a full end of thee : but I will correct thee in measure, and will in no wise leave thee unpunished" (Jer. 30. 10, 11).

"Therefore, behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that they shall no more say, As Jehovah liveth, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt ; but, As Jehovah liveth, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them. And they shall dwell in their own land" (Jer. 23. 7, 8).

"But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people Israel for they are at hand to come. For, behold I am for you, and I will turn you, and ye shall be tilled and sown ;

and I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it ; and the cities shall be builded ; and I will multiply upon you man and beast ; and they shall increase and be fruitful ; and I will cause you to be inhabited after your former estate, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings ; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah.

“Yea, I will cause men to walk upon you, even my people Israel ; and they shall possess thee, and thou shalt be their inheritance, and thou shalt no more henceforth bereave them of children. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah : Because they say unto you, Thou land art a devourer of men, and hast been a bereaver of thy nation” (Ezek. 36. 8-13).

Since Zionism was born, forty years ago, there has been a steady development of the spirit of nationalism among the Jews, and a growing longing to return to the land of their fathers. These aspirations were greatly encouraged by the “Balfour Declaration” in which Great Britain opened Palestine as the national home for the Jews.

Since then, as we all know, a wave of anti-Semitism has spread over Europe : tens of thousands of Jews have been murdered, and to-day they are being cruelly persecuted in Germany and Italy. In Palestine also, their ambitions and projects are being challenged by the Arabs, and at this very hour (1938) the situation is very critical.

Is this not the budding of the fig-tree, of which the Lord spoke in His Olivet Discourse ?

“Now from the fig-tree learn her parable : when her branch is now become tender, and putting forth its leaves, ye know that summer is nigh ; even so ye also, when ye see all these things know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all those things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

Yes, heaven and earth will pass away, but Christ's words will be fulfilled, and it is not in the power of all the Governments in the

world to prevent it. Christ Himself will come again and carry out His own programme.

One more "sign" of Christ's approaching return must be mentioned, namely,

V. Universal Strife

In that same Olivet Discourse, the Lord said : "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars ; see that ye be not troubled ; for these things must needs come to pass ; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation ; and kingdom against kingdom ; and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail."

Now, it is a matter of fact that the world has never been free from war, but never, until our time, has it been universal. In 1914-18, the whole world was at war for the first time in history ; and in consequence of that, it is now well-nigh impossible to localise wars. The inter-relation of the nations is such that the action of one directly or indirectly affects all.

Recent events and the situation now (Autumn, 1938) are too deeply impressed on the minds of us all to need a survey here, but certainly, as never before, is the Lord's prediction being fulfilled. The whole world is an armed camp, and before long the greatest disaster of history will be upon us. But that will not be the end. Dark is deepest before the dawn ; and when iniquity and cruelty appear to have triumphed, when the forces of tyranny are insolently jubilant, then will Christ come, whose right it is to reign. He will be "revealed from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus : who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believe in that day."

And the Antichrist "He will consume with the breath of His mouth, and shall

bring to naught by the manifestation of His coming.”

Then shall dawn the Golden Age for which the world has sighed so long, when “many nations shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, and to the house of the God of Jacob ; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem ; and He will judge between many people, and will decide concerning strong nations afar off : and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks ; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

Here, then, are five predicted “signs” of the approaching return of Christ in glory.

If it be objected that these “signs” have appeared before, for example, at the time of the French Revolution, and of the Napoleonic wars, let it be said, that never before have they all appeared together, and universally, as they do to-day.

It still remains true that we cannot tell *when* Christ will come, but if "signs" of His approach have been given, unless our senses and judgments utterly play us false, these are now present, and the coming of the Lord cannot be far distant.

This being so, the call comes to you and to me to be ready for Him ; ready by faith in His salvation, ready by conformity to His good will, and ready by persistent and courageous witness. Dark times are ahead of us, but a bright time is beyond that.

"The crowning day is coming by and by."

THE ADVENT AND THE AGES

CHAPTER V

The Advent and the Ages

“A thousand years” (Rev. 20).

SO far we have seen that the Biblical philosophy of history is the only one that fits into the needs of a world like ours ; that Christ plainly taught that He would come again to this world in person ; that the second advent was of the very substance of the faith and hope of the apostolic Church ; and that the predicted signs of the approaching return of the Lord have accumulated and are more clearly evident to-day than ever they have been before.

Now let us consider the advent in relation to the several ages into which human history falls in the on-going purpose of the redeeming God. That there are such ages or dispensations is too evident to be debated. “Dispensation” is a Biblical word (*oikonomia*,

from *oikos*, a house, and *nemein*, to dispense), and means literally the management of a household. The idea is reflected in our English word *economy*, which originally meant administration.

Of such dispensations there are in the main three, and these are separated from one another by the first and second advents of Christ.

KEPLER, the astronomer, resolved to discover the law of planetary motion, and for eight years he toiled, making nineteen successive experiments, but without success. Before abandoning the effort he decided to try once more ; and his twentieth hypothesis was, that the stellar worlds move not in a circle around a centre, but in an ellipse around two foci. When he put that key into the heavens it yielded to him the secret which had so long been hid ; and, bursting with enthusiasm, he threw up his arms and cried: "Oh, Almighty God, I am thinking Thy thoughts after Thee."

As to God's plan in human history, great confusion in the minds of multitudes has

resulted from assuming that it moved in a circle round the centre of the Incarnation, whereas, in point of fact, it moves in an ellipse around the foci of the first and second advents.

The advents divide time into past, present, and future. The *past* dispensation reaches to Christ's first coming, the *present* lies between the first and the second comings, and the *future* reaches from the second coming onwards.

These dispensations we may speak of respectively as the *Mosaic*, the *Christian*, and the *Millennial*; and their respective characteristics are, *Law*, *Grace* and *Righteousness*. In this view history forms a perfect plan, with its commencement, its course, and its consummation.

In the *past* ages are two facts :

The Failure of the First Adam. "The woman took of the fruit and did eat, and gave also unto her husband, and they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord" (Gen. 3. 6-8).

The Revelation of Deliverance. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Gen. 3. 15).

In the *future* are two corresponding facts :

The Realisation of Deliverance. "The whole creation delivered from the bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8. 20, 21).

The Triumph of the Last Adam. "In the Name of Jesus every knee (shall) bow, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue (shall) confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2. 10, 11).

In the *present* age are four central facts :

The Ministration of Christ. "The Son of Man came to minister" (Mark 10. 45).

The Crucifixion of Christ. "When they were come to Calvary, there they crucified Him" (Luke 23. 33).

The Resurrection of Christ. "He is not here, but is risen" (Luke 24. 6).

The Ascension of Christ. "It came to pass while He blessed them, He was parted from

them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24. 51).

Now, it will easily be seen that to complete this plan of history, two other facts are necessary, one historical, and the other prophetic. The historical fact of

The First Advent, connecting the past with the present : "The word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us" (John 1. 14) ; and the prophetic fact of

The Second Advent, connecting the present with the future : "This same Jesus Who is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven" (Acts 1. 11).

If the prophetic fact is denied or ignored, between the Ascension of Christ and the Realization of Deliverance, man must substitute some way of accomplishment other than that which the New Testament provides.

In our first talk we saw that man has not hesitated to do this, the world substituting the *evolutionary* theory, and Christendom substituting the *leavening* theory. The

course of events has utterly discredited both these theories : man is not advancing, but retreating, and the world was never further from being converted than it is to-day.

The first advent was absolutely necessary to make the central facts of the Gospel *possible*, and the second advent will be absolutely necessary to make those facts *effectual*.

All revealed truth is important, but all is not equally important. Truth may be regarded as an imposing and beautiful temple, firmly founded, finely erected, and perfectly finished ; and although nothing could be taken from it without marring its completeness, we must distinguish between its stones for *beauty* and its stones for *basis*.

Among its foundation stones we must reckon the first and second advents of Christ, for, were they removed, the temple of truth would collapse. In insisting on this fact we are not trying to give currency to some new idea, for the second coming of Christ is recognised in all the great Creedal Formularies.

The Apostles' Creed says : Christ "ascended into heaven ; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty ; *from thence He shall come* to judge the quick and the dead."

The *Constantinopolitan Creed* says : He "ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and *shall come again with glory* to judge the living and the dead, whose Kingdom shall have no end."

The *Te Deum* says : "We believe that *Thou shalt come* to be our Judge."

The *Athanasian Creed* says : He "sitteth at the right hand of the Father, *from whence He shall come* to judge the living and the dead, at *Whose advent* all men are to rise again with their bodies, and render an account of their own deeds . . ."

The *Larger Westminster Catechism* says : "We pray that Christ would hasten the time of His second coming."

A similar clause is found in the Creedal Formularies of the Graeco-Russian Church, the Moravian Church, the Lutheran Churches,

the Calvinistic Churches, the Baptist and Congregational Churches, and of the Quakers, and the Plymouth Brethren. Yet, strangely enough, these Churches do not preach it, the Brethren excepted, and, I suppose, the vast majority of the members constituting them do not believe it, except in a spiritualised way.

In all likelihood this is to be accounted for, partly at any rate, by the theory known as Post-Millennialism, which teaches :

1. That "through Christian agencies the Gospel gradually permeates the entire world and becomes immeasurably more effective than at present.

2. That "this condition thus reached will continue for a thousand years.

3. That "the Jews will be converted either at the beginning or some time during this period.

4. That "following this will be a brief apostasy and terrible conflict of Christian and evil forces.

5. That "finally and simultaneously, there

will occur the advent of Christ, general resurrection, judgment, the old world destroyed by fire, the new heavens and the new earth will be revealed" (Schaff-Herzog, vii. 377).

It may be said that to the time of Constantine, that is, to the close of the third century of our era, the belief of the Church was that Christ will return to establish His Kingdom on earth, and that, following the advent, the government of the world for a thousand years will be under His administration ; that in this way the promises and prophecies of the Old Covenant will be fulfilled. The evidence of this belief is abundant, as the following authorities affirm :

SCHAFF, the eminent ecclesiastical historian, writes : "The most striking point in the eschatology of the Ante-Nicene age is the prominent Chiliasm, or Millenarianism, that is, the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years before the general resurrection and judgment. . . . It was a widely

current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius.

GIBBON, in his great work, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," says : "The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium . . . was carefully inculcated by a succession of Fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who conversed with the immediate disciples of the Apostles, down to Lactantius, who was the preceptor of the son of Constantine. . . . It appears to have been the reigning sentiment of all orthodox believers."

MOSHEIM, the Church historian, says : "The prevailing opinion that Christ was to come and reign a thousand years among men before the final dissolution of the world, had met with no opposition until the time of Origen."

CHILLINGWORTH says : "The doctrine of the Millenaries was believed and taught by the most eminent Fathers of the ages next

after the Apostles, and by none of that age opposed or condemned ; therefore, it was the Catholic (*i.e.*, universal) doctrine of those times."

STACKHOUSE, a theologian, says : "It cannot be denied that this doctrine has its antiquity, and was once the general opinion of all orthodox Christians."

BISHOP NEWTON, an eminent writer on prophecy, says : "The doctrine of the Millennium was generally believed in the first three and purest ages."

BISHOP RUSSELL, a professor of ecclesiastical history in the Scottish Episcopal Church, says : "The belief was universal and undisputed."

But from the time of Constantine, who was half Christian and half Pagan, the Pre-Millennial Coming of the Lord came to be regarded as heresy. The Council of Laodicea, in A.D. 360., excluded the Book of the Revelation from the Bible.

"The Greek Church was saturated with prejudice against the Apocalypse." "In the

course of the fourth century it was removed from the Greek canon, and thus the troublesome foundation on which Chiliasm might have continued to build was got rid of. . . . For many centuries the Greek Church kept the Apocalypse out of its canon. The sayings of this book were sealed." John's last message was refused."

The Roman Church also rejected Pre-Millennialism. M'Clintock and Strong's Ecclesiastical Cyclopaedia, says that "the canons of the Council of Nice were forged at Rome in the interests of the Papacy at an early period."

The Council of Rome under Pope Damasus, in 373, formally denounced Chiliasm (*i.e.*, Millennialism), and this antagonism to the doctrine had the weighty support of Jerome and Augustine.

BARONIUS, a Roman Catholic historian of the sixteenth century, says that after Rome's formal denunciation of Chiliasm, the doctrine was derided with "hisses and laughter," and being "under the ban," was "entirely extir-

pated." This light was then extinguished, but its beams glimmered among the mountains.

NEANDER says : "Rome was anti-Chilastic."

Professor BRIGGS affirms that after Caius, 220 A.D. "the 'error' does not appear subsequently in the Church of Rome."

"Wherever the influence and authority of the Church of Rome have extended," declares Bishop NEWTON, "she hath endeavoured by all means to discredit this doctrine."

BURNET says : "Rome always had an evil eye on the Millennium," and also states that he "never met with a Popish doctor that held the Millennium," but they all believe that "Christ reigns already by His vicar, the Pope."

CHILLINGWORTH remarks : "That this doctrine is by the present Romish Church held false and heretical, I think no man will deny."

WHITBY himself acknowledges that pre-Millennialism "is now rejected by all Roman Catholics."

Rome dated the Millennium from the rise of Constantine, and regarded herself as the judge and ruler of the world, and this view prevailed until the time of the Reformation.

There were, however, through this long dark period, those who held to the Pre-Millennial belief, the Waldenses, the Montanists, the Novatians, the Paulicians, and others, all of whom were cruelly persecuted for their faith.

The truth thus sacrificially held was again to triumph, and from the twelfth century among those who denounced the heresies and corruptions of Rome, and looked for the coming of the Lord to establish His Millennial Kingdom, and by their witness made possible the Reformation of the sixteenth century, were Joachim of Floris, Peter Waldo, Francis of Assisi, William Occam, John Wyclif, Sir John Oldcastle, John Huss, and Savonarola. These were the noble forerunners of Tyndale, Ridley, Latimer, Cranmer, and Luther.

“It was a Pre-Millennial Church that over-

threw Paganism and the Roman Empire, and won victories in lands where Caesar's eagles never flew. It was missionary to the core." NEANDER observes that "it was a solace and support to the Christians to anticipate that even here, on earth, the scene of their sufferings, the Church was destined to triumph in its perfected and glorified state."

Which of these views is the truth, the Pre-Millennial or the Post-Millennial coming of the Lord, must be decided by the teaching of the Bible.

It is true that the word "*Millennium*" occurs only six times in the Bible, and that these occurrences are all in seven verses in one chapter of one book, but what there is so named is a subject of both the Testaments.

A kingdom of Messiah is predicted in the Old Testament which has not yet been established ; and in the New Testament, outside of the "Revelation," there are several passages which, to say the least, seem to presuppose a kingdom of Christ on earth which shall be ushered in by His second advent.

There is the prayer which Christ taught His disciples : "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth" (Matt. 6. 10).

Christ would not teach us to pray for something that is impossible of realisation ; and if His will is ever to be done in this world, as it is ever perfectly done in heaven, it will not be by any process of civilization, but by judgment and power.

Then there is that passage in 1 Corinthians 15. 22-26 : "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order : Christ the firstfruits ; then they that are Christ's at His coming. Then cometh the end when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father ; when He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death."

When and how this will be done is related in 2 Thessalonians 1. 6-10.

"If so be that it is a righteous thing with

God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you, and to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus ; who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be marvelled at in all them that believe in that day."

To these passages must be added the evidence of the Book of the Revelation, which, we believe, is an integral part of Holy Scripture.

If by any process of evolution, or civilization, or promulgation of Christian principles the world could be brought into the moral and spiritual state which we associate with the idea of a millennium, there would seem to be no need for Christ to come. What makes His return absolutely necessary, if a kingdom of righteousness is to be estab-

lished on the earth, is the too obvious fact that man is utterly unable to establish such a kingdom.

Post-Millennialism is a taunting dream. Pre-Millennialism is an energising hope. The period during which Post-Millennialism dominated the thought of Christendom is known as the Dark Middle Ages. Every sort of evil was practised. One writer says : "There was no vice which was not prevalent among the clergy and in the monasteries, and immorality passed over from them to the people."

I am not implying that belief in a Post-Millennial coming of Christ promotes immorality ; there were other reasons for the state of affairs during that long period of Rome's blighting rule ; but what I do imply is that genuine belief in a Pre-Millennial coming of Christ promotes an attitude of watchfulness, a spirit of earnestness, practical holiness of life, and missionary enthusiasm.

That Pre-Millennialists differ among themselves as to details does not disprove Pre-

Millennialism, any more than different theories of Atonement or Inspiration discredit these truths.

Those who see in the Scriptures a distinction between the Christian Church and Christ's world-wide Kingdom on earth, who distinguish between His coming to the air and His return to this world, have every reason to believe that the advent is at hand.

If the Christian Church is to be raptured (1 Thess. 4) before the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7) and "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30. 7), which Christ will terminate by His return to this world, then, He may come now at any time for His people, for, as I have tried to show, the predicted "signs" of the promised advent seem to be all present and are becoming more accentuated.

I have endeavoured in these talks to avoid controversial details, and many irrelevancies often associated with this subject. I have sought also to avoid a militant advocacy of what I believe the Scriptures teach, and to state deliberately and soberly the salient

truths, but I would not have this method convey the idea either that the truth taught is not clear, or that it is of only minor importance.

If we believe the Bible teaches that Christ will return from heaven to this world to judge the nations and to establish an universal kingdom of righteousness, and that before He does so, He will remove His Church from the earth ; if we believe it teaches that certain "signs" will herald the approach of these events, and if these "signs" are all discernable in our times, then, surely such a belief should promote a mighty revival of practical religion in the land, should lead God's people to untiring watchfulness and sacrificial service, and should stir us to joyful song.

That these experiences are not ours is evidence that in no real way do we believe these truths. The alternatives to-day are not a Pre-Millennial or a Post-Millennial coming of Christ but a Pre-Millennial advent, or no advent at all.

The hard facts of history should by now have shattered all our illusions about a man-made Utopia, and should have led us to find comfort and strength in Christ's plan and promise.

"Saviour, long Thy saints have waited—
Centuries have passed away
Since the promise first was given
Of a glorious Advent day;
Grey and old the world is growing,
Loud the scoffer's boast is heard ;
But our hearts are peaceful, knowing
We may rest upon Thy Word.

"Lo ! the fig-tree buds and blossoms ;
Lo ! the shadows flee away.
Glad we lift our heads expectant,
Brief will now be Thy delay.
Thou to raise the dead art able,
O'er the grave Thou didst prevail ;
Heaven and earth may prove unstable,
But Thy Word can never fail.

"Precious, precious parting promise !
Sweetly linger in our ears ;
Brightly gleam amid our darkness,
Gently sooth away our fears.
Ever nerve us for the conflict,
Ever fill our souls with joy ;
Christ will come and will not tarry—
Nothing can our hope destroy."

The proud Colossus of Gentile civilization will be struck on the feet by the Divine Stone, and will crash to its doom ; and in its place will come the rule of Him Whose "dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom from generation to generation."

"But who can abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. And He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver" (Mal. 3. 2, 3).

In 1836, Dr. THOMAS CHALMERS wrote to the Rev. Edward Bickersteth, the following solemn words : "I utterly despair of the universal prevalence of Christianity as the result of a pacific, missionary process, under the guidance of human wisdom and principle. But without slackening in the least our obligation to help forward this great cause, I look for the conclusive establishment (of Christianity) through a widening passage of desolating judgments, with the utter demolition of our present civil and ecclesiastical structures."

One hundred years have passed since those words were written, and the course of events has been such as to confirm this view of the end of our age.

Since Chalmers' day civilization has made great progress. Science, especially mechanical science, has made enormous strides. Social and industrial abuses have been corrected, and the amenities of life have been vastly multiplied, but will anyone claim that there has come any corresponding moral and spiritual uplift? Is not human ingenuity to-day being employed for human destruction? Can we not at the present time hear the cracking of modern civilization, and can we not look down into deep and fearsome fissures in our modern life? Surely these things are symptomatic of coming disasters which will be the judgment of God on nations for their sins, and beyond which alone is there hope.

These solemn facts are a challenge and a call to us all : to the people of God, for a more complete dedication of themselves to Him

and His service ; and to the unconverted, a challenge and a call for repentance in respect of sin and faith in the Saviour.

For the Christian, "the night is far spent, and the day is at hand" : but for the sinner, "the day is far spent, and the night is at hand." What a night !

**THE
CHALLENGE TO THE CHRISTIAN**

CHAPTER VI

The Challenge to the Christian

“Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is” (Mark. 13: 33.)

SO far we have been considering the subject of the Lord's return in its philosophical, historical, and evidential aspects ; but the Bible does not leave the matter there. This truth, like every other, has its ethical and practical bearing.

No Biblical truth is presented merely for intellectual apprehension. From the doctrinal foundation there should arise a practical superstructure. The root is for the sake of the fruit. The Bible knows nothing of abstract truth ; it moves entirely in the realm of life and promotes experience of the blessings which it reveals.

An interest in prophecy which is merely speculative and sensational comes perilously

near to being sinful. The subject of the Lord's return is no more a matter of academic interest than is His dying on Calvary. In its very essence it is spiritual and ethical, experimental and practical, and only in so far as it is this to us, do we believe in it at all, for it is not the doctrine to which we give intellectual assent that we believe, but that which is formative of our character and conduct.

Christian faith, in addition to being *the assent of the mind*, is also *the consent of the will*. Christ said : "If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them."

There is a knowledge which is purely *mental perception*, and there is a knowledge which is *personal experience*. In the one case the subject or object has simply come within the knower's sphere of perception or circle of vision. In the other case it is a personal and true relation between the person knowing and the subject or object known.

It is true that *creed* is the basis of *conduct*, and that *right thinking* is the foundation of

right living ; but we must remember that, whereas superstructures cannot be built without foundations, foundations can be laid on which superstructures are not built.

The Bible relates to one another *belief and morality, doctrine and practice, faith and action*, and it is always perilous to separate these. Christianity is not a set of *dogmas to be believed* : it is *a life to be lived*.

We are all in danger of substituting *delight* in hearing the Gospel for *diligence* in living it ; but we must learn that true religion is not *diction*, but *action* ; that *spiritual insight* must have *practical issue*.

Our faith should be not a *sedative*, but a *stimulus* ; not an *indulgence*, but an *inspiration*. The Christian revelation is not simply *a message to be heard*, it is also *a deed to be done*. On one side it is *reception*, and on the other side it is *performance* : on one side it is *intellectual responsiveness*, and on the other side it is *ethical responsibility*.

Every doctrine has its associated duty, and every truth has its task. Where there is

impression there should be *expression* : if we *know* we should *do*, and our happiness depends upon the degree in which we correlate our knowledge and our duty.

What is the use of generating steam if it is not brought to bear on an engine ? Of what use is apple-blossom if it is not followed by fruit ? Of what use is medical training if one cannot minister to the physical needs of men ? Of what use is military discipline and training if in the hour of a country's extremity one cannot help to defend his threatened shores ?

In like manner, of what use are Christian doctrines if they have no bearing on a Christian's living ?

There are two things that we should resolve to avoid, *indolent knowledge* and *ignorant action*.

Now, let all this be applied to the matter before us.

The subject of the Lord's return is one of intensely practical import, and anything of the nature of curiosity-mongering, date-fixing,

and star-gazing are utterly condemnable.

The object of the teaching of the Lord and His apostles is always to promote conformity of life to revealed truth. Speaking of His second advent, Christ said :

“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

“Take ye heed, watch and pray ; for ye know not when the time is.

“For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

“Watch ye therefore : for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning :

“Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.”

Here a threefold duty is enjoined.

Firstly, Christ bids us *work*. “He gave to every man his work.” All Christ’s people

are His servants, and all have a task to accomplish, a ministry to render, and an office to fill. Each of us has his own work, a work for which we are specially qualified, and which is committed to us and to no other. How practical and elevating a view of the Christian life !

Christ's exhortation to "occupy" does not mean merely that we should fill up the time, but that each of us should do the thing that we were sent into the world to do.

To stop work in order to look for Christ's return would only show one's unfitness for that event, and is condemned by the New Testament.

Secondly, Christ bids us *watch*. Four times in these few verses does this word occur, as it does frequently in our Lord's utterances on the subject of His return. Working is not to be made a substitute for watching. If we would do our best work we must cherish an attitude of expectation, and cultivate a feeling of responsibility.

Because of the *certainty* of the fact of

Christ's return our faith and hope should be quickened, and because of the *uncertainty* of the time we should be in a continual state of watchfulness.

Did we *know* that the event was just about to happen we should be unfitted for the sober discharge of the duties of life ; and did we *know* that it was remote, the assurance would prompt us to sloth and negligence.

We are left in the midst of dangers not to depress our courage, but to quicken our vigilance.

Thirdly, Christ bids us *pray*. By prayer we keep in touch with God, and so are given *power to work and patience to watch*.

Prayer without work is mockery, and work without prayer is useless. In like manner prayer and watching go together. If we *watch without praying*, we depend on human strength and dispense with Divine aid ; and if we *pray without watching* we depend on Divine strength alone, and despise the human means of help which God Himself has commanded us to employ.

Watchfulness is like the hands of the clock that point ; and prayer is the weight that keeps the machinery in motion.

Here, then, is our threefold duty in the light of Christ's promised return : we should work, and watch, and pray.

But as near to every duty is a danger, the exhortation enfolds a warning. There is first the danger of *sinful indolence*. Indolence is sinful because it means that the work which has been entrusted to us is not done. The Bible is loud in its condemnation of the people who *do nothing*.

Deborah, in her song, pours scorn upon all such. In the battle between the Israelites and the Canaanites some of the tribes of Israel were missing,^r and Deborah says :

"By the water courses of Reuben
There were great resolves of heart !
Why satest thou among the sheepfolds,
To hear the piping of the flocks ?
At the water^r courses^r of Reuben
There were great searchings of heart !
Gilead abode beyond Jordan—
And Dan, why did he remain in ships ?
Asher sat still at the haven of the sea,
And abode by his creeks."

Their sin was in that they did nothing in the day of their opportunity.

This also was the condemnation of Edom when Judah had need of them. Their negligence is spoken of as "violence," and Obadiah says to them : "In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his substance, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, *even thou wast as one of them.*"

And terribly severe is the Lord's condemnation of the man who did nothing with his talent. That idler thought that he was doing good so long as he was doing no ill ; he thought that not to squander his talent was as good as to use it. His boasted virtue was a cold abstinence from evil, but upon such inaction Christ pronounces an awful judgment.

Then, there is the danger of *dreamy unconcern*. "Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping" (Mark 13. 36). Is there anything more despicable and criminal than to

sleep at the post of duty? What must be said of a captain who sleeps on the bridge? Of a soldier who sleeps at his post? Of a watchman who sleeps in the night? Of a lighthouse-keeper who sleeps in the storm? And what must be said of the Christian who, in a world like this, and with Christ on the way back, spends his time in dreamy unconcern?

This spiritual stupor is the sin of multitudes, and the returning Christ cries loudly to us: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise, lest coming suddenly I find you *doing nothing*."

Turning now to the Apostolic Letters, we find that the hope of Christ's return is always associated with experimental Christianity. There is at least a fivefold application of this truth to the state and service of the believer.

Belief that the Lord will come again should produce :

I. PURITY OF CHARACTER.

The Apostle John says: "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet

made manifest what we shall be. We know that if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him even as He is. And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

Both Paul and Peter speak frequently of the hope of the believer, but this is the only place where John speaks of it. It has been a matter of dispute as to what the hope is in this passage, whether our being like Christ, or the manifestation of Christ. But surely these thoughts cannot be separated? Let everyone that hath the hope of perfect assimilation to Christ consequent upon His manifestation, purify himself—this would seem to be the most natural interpretation of the verse, and we will so regard it.

The reference is perhaps to the purification of the people of God on the eve of His manifestation upon Sinai. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to-day and to-morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day ; for the third day the Lord will

come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai" (Exod. 19. 10, 11).

A like exhortation appears in 2 Corinthians 7. 1, where we read : "Having therefore these promises dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." And yet once more, the character and direction of this purification is set forth in Titus 2. 11, 12, 13, where it is exhibited in *soberness* selfward, in *righteousness* manward, and in *godliness* Godward. It should be noted also that this work of purification is not instantaneous but progressive ; he who has this hope does purify himself constantly and ceaselessly, for there never comes a time in our present estate when we no longer need to be purified.

Now this practical, ceaseless, heart purification entails much, and it is just because of what it entails that many draw back from it. In the passage in 2 Corinthians already referred to, that which is both the cause and effect of such purification is separation from

the world, from all unholy alliances and spiritual compromises, and the people of God are called to "come out" from these things. No doubt many regard this passage as hard and unsympathetic, but surely it is because they have weighed the precept without having had any regard to the motive.

Why this command to separate? Because the Lord Jesus is coming again, and everyone that hath this hope fixed upon him will, and does, purify himself even as Christ, in respect of His perfect humanity, is pure.

If believers are not thus purifying themselves, the reason is close at hand, they are not living in the advent light, and in the joy of our hope. To such, one look at Christ will serve to reveal the utter hollowness of all they have chosen in place of Him, and to fill the heart, for howsoever brief a time, with the agony of remorse. But to those who have heard His word and obeyed, that first long look at His blessed face will compensate a thousand times over for any seeming loss which we may have sustained here.

Then again, belief that the Lord will come again should produce

2. STEADFASTNESS OF FAITH

Paul, writing to the Philippians, says : "Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto Himself. Therefore, my brethren beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved."

"In the Lord," is one of the key notes of this Epistle, occurring significantly seven times. In chap. 1. 14, *spiritual relationship* is possible only "in the Lord" ; in chap. 2. 19, *hope* can flourish only "in the Lord" ; in chap. 2. 24, *true confidence* can be treated and sustained only "in the Lord" ; in chap. 2. 29, *true fellowship* is realised only "in the Lord" ; in chap. 4. 2, *oneness of mind* is possible only "in the Lord" ; in chap. 4. 4, *unceasing joy* can be discovered only "in the Lord" ; and in chap. 4. 1, we are exhorted to *steadfastness* "in the Lord."

The word "therefore" connects this verse with what goes immediately before it, which, as you will see, has reference to the second advent of the Lord. Our citizenship is in heaven, and our Saviour is also there, we therefore eagerly await His appearance, because when He comes this body in which we are humbled will be transfigured and made like unto the body in which He is glorified. Sufficient reason, we think, for the eager waiting of so many.

But while we wait, we have a duty to perform, a charge to keep, a life to live, and we must "in the Lord" stand fast. We are bidden to "stand *against* the wiles of the Devil," to "stand *in* the power of God," and to "stand *perfect and complete*" in all His will, because soon "we must stand *before* the Judgment Seat of Christ ;" and we can do these things only as we "stand *fast* in the Lord."

Of course we must be "in the Lord" before we can stand fast in Him, and the coming again of the Saviour can bring nothing but dismay and terror to those who are out of

Christ. But those who are in Him must stand fast in Him.

The secret of this steadfastness is set forth in chap. 3, of this Epistle ; and the result is seen in chap. 4. The secret lies in having no confidence in the flesh, and in counting all things loss for Christ, in apprehending that for which we have been apprehended by Him, and in looking eagerly for the glorious consummation of the Divine purposes in His coming again.

The result is made manifest in our Divine Security (7) ; in our enjoyment of the Divine Society (9) ; in the evidence we give of Divine Satisfaction (11) ; in our glorying in the Divine Strength (13) ; and in our claiming and possessing the Divine Supplies (19). Surely then we should "stand fast in the Lord." And yet how few comparatively are doing so, and the reason is not far to seek—they do not believe that He is coming again, they do not possess this "blessed hope," and they do not bear the fruits which such an expectation produces. But let all who believe

His Word, and await His appearing, "stand fast" in Him.

Again, belief that the Lord will come again should promote :

3. HOLINESS OF WALK

"And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep ; for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand : let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk becomingly, as in the day ; not in revelling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13. 11-14).

Here again the structure is clear and concise. There is a threefold exhortation beginning in each instance with the words "we should" and the order of these injunctions is very significant.

"We should cast off."

"We should put on."

"We should walk."

There can be no "putting on" until there has been first a "casting off," and there can be no "walking" that is glorifying to God until we have both "cast off" and "put on." What this holy walk entails is set forth in detail in chaps. 14. 1; 15. 7, where Christian toleration, responsibility, and love are viewed in their relation to one another, and the example of Christ is put forth as the standard.

But what motive is furnished for such a walk?

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand : we should therefore—" Nor could we possess a more powerful motive. The coming unveiling of our hidden Lord should enable us to endure or achieve anything during our brief waiting time, knowing as we do that that which has been achieved will be fully recognised, and that which has been endured, fully recompensed in the unclouded vision of Himself.

Further, belief that the Lord will come again should produce :

4. COMPASSION FOR SOULS

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at His coming? For ye are our glory and our joy” (1 Thess. 2. 19-20).

Every soul is saved to serve ; each redeemed person is designed to be, down here, a base of operations for God : a channel, an instrument, used of God for the fulfilment of His eternal purpose. Are we that? Are you? Am I?

The Apostle Paul in the contemplation of the Lord's return, looks upon those whom he brought to Calvary for salvation and he says : “These will be my crown of glorying when Christ appears.” The things that loom so large before us now, will then appear very small, and many of the things which we are neglecting now, will then be seen to have been of chief importance in His sight. Then, it will not be the length of our Church Roll or the largeness of the attendances, the aesthe-

tic character of the services, or the culture of the sermons, but, who have I brought to Jesus the Saviour ?

“Must I go and empty-handed,
Meet my dear Redeemer so,
Not one soul with which to greet Him—
Must I empty-handed go ?”

But if we are awaiting His coming and “the golden spires of day”, what passion will be begotten within us to bring to Christ the souls for whom He died, both at home and abroad ? Nothing like the hope of His coming will keep us at our Father’s business, which is to seek and to save that which is lost, who as they are gathered in, shall become our hope and joy and crown of rejoicing.

Once more, belief that the Lord will come again should promote :

5. WATCHFULNESS OF DISPOSITION

“For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you ; and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, Whom He

raised from the dead, even Jesus, Who delivereth us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1. 9-10).

In this short passage we have presented to us a wonderfully full view of the position of every true Christian. It is described in relation to the past, the present, and the future. These Thessalonians (*a*) turned to God from idols ; (*b*) to serve the living and true God ; and (*c*) to wait for His Son from heaven. Thus, turning, serving, and waiting should characterise each of us who are the people of God. These three thoughts also contain the truth concerning full salvation, already spoken of.

The "turning" tells of the salvation of the soul ; the "serving" is, from one point of view, God's means for the salvation of the life, and the "waiting" makes us even now to enjoy in anticipation the completed redemption, when the body shall be saved for ever. We cannot "serve" unless we have "turned," and we shall not be "waiting" unless we are "serving."

How wonderfully organic Scripture doctrine is ; its order cannot be inverted, neither can any of its parts be deducted without impairing the whole. It is to be feared that to-day very many believers are resting on half truths, and consequently only existing when they should be living. Such we would earnestly exhort to come into line with all the truths and purposes of God, and find in the coming of Christ, their perfection, as in His cradle they found their hope, and in His Cross their salvation.

Let it again be said that we really believe only those truths which are practical factors in our lives. Theoretical theology is worse than useless. Intellectual apprehension of truths which we do not allow to shape our character and guide our conduct, but adds to our present responsibility, and will increase our final condemnation.

If Christ returned to-day, would He find a Laodicean Church ?

THE POSITION OF THE SINNER

CHAPTER VII

The Position of the Sinner

“What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark. 8. 36.)

THE first of these Talks was *philosophical* in complexion ; the second and third were *prophetical* ; the fourth was *evidential* ; the fifth was *historico-prophetical* ; and the last two are *practical*, the sixth being a challenge to the Christian, and the seventh, to the unconverted.

The Bible offers no hope to the sinner who dies in his sins, but it would seem that salvation is not beyond the reach of any while he lives, even after Christ has removed His Church from the world. The “great multitude” of every nation, of whom we read in the Apocalypse (chap. 7) are such as will “come out of the great tribulation,” having “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (14).

It seems clear from a number of passages in Scripture that, following the removal from the earth of the true Church of God, Satan will be allowed enormous power, and will exhibit "great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Rev. 12. 12). Antichrist will be manifested ; a spirit of delusion will be abroad, and a period of universal and unprecedented suffering will follow.

This is the period to which Christ refers when He says : "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved" (Matt. 24. 21-22).

This is the period referred to in the major part of the Apocalypse, where we see the Seals broken, hear the blast of the Trumpets, and are told of the outpouring of the Bowls of God's wrath.

The language of the Apocalypse is not the articulation of hysteria or madness, but is a

Divine unveiling of things "which must shortly come to pass."

The final verdict on unsaved *individuals* will be passed after they have departed this life, but *nations* must be judged while they are living. There is a moral judgment which is proceeding all the time, but the Bible tells of a final judgment at "the time of the end."

"God hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained." And the evidence that He can and will do so is, "in that He hath raised Christ from the dead" (Acts 17. 31).

Christ lives not only to save, but also to judge, and this latter is the fact seized upon by all the Creeds of Christendom.

The Apostles' Creed says : "From thence (heaven) He shall come *to judge* the quick and the dead." Here, in language eloquent in its brevity, the *fact* and the *purpose* of the second advent are declared. "He shall come ;" there is the *fact* ; "to judge the quick and the dead," there is the *purpose*.

This is the day of God's patience and salvation. To-morrow will be the day of His wrath and judgment. Because the God of the universe is a moral God, He must judge all sin, iniquity, unrighteousness, rebellion against His will, and the rejection of His grace.

The evildoer is not going to get away with it. "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Ask of Me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with the rod of iron: thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and

ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.”

Christ’s first advent was in mercy, His second will be in wrath. “The great day of His wrath is coming, and who shall be able to stand?”

There is a terrible passage in the Prophecy of Isaiah, depicting that coming day:

“Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?”

“I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”

“Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat?”

“I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury: and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of

vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.

“And I looked and there was none to help ; and I wondered that there was none to uphold : therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me : and my fury, it upheld me.

“And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.”

And referring to the same period is another awful passage, in Revelation 19. 11-21.

“And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse ; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns ; and He had a name written, that no man knew but He Himself.

“And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood ; and His name is called the Word of God.

“And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of

His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations ; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron : and He treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

“And I saw an angel standing in the sun ; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God : that ye may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

“And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army.

“And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had

received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

“And the remnant were slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of His mouth : and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.”

There is a sad day ahead for this ungodly world ; a day when “the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man shall hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and shall cry to the mountains and rocks:

“Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb : for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand ?” (Rev. 6. 12-17).

Right under our eyes we are witnessing a form and extent of rebellion against God, which, surely, is without precedent. We are

witnessing also a degree of power on the part of individuals, dictators of nations, which should convince anyone of the practicability of an antichrist, and we are face to face with barbaric cruelties on the part of supposedly civilized peoples, which one would have thought incredible, and which make it easy to believe in the predicted sufferings which will immediately precede Christ's return to this world.

Between this age of *grace*, and the promised age of *glory*, will be a period of unparalleled suffering and desolating *judgment*, which shall be consummated and concluded by the advent of Christ, and for which rapid preparation is now being made.

Of these facts the world is utterly ignorant, and mere professors of religion are scornful ; but Christ said : "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and knew not, until the

flood came, and took them all away ; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

I am no pessimist, but it were better to be an intelligent pessimist than a blind optimist. Awareness of the good there is in the world to-day should not, and surely cannot blind us to the appalling conditions of our time and the gravity of the hour.

He is foolish indeed who loses sight of the individual peril in his consciousness of the national or world peril. The Totalitarian State is in absolute antagonism to Christ in respect of the individual. Dictators act on the principle that the world is all, but Christ asks : "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

That is the thing of practical and pressing importance in the light of Christ's return. Think for a moment, first of all, of

GAINING THE WORLD

There are people who gain, *not* the world, and yet lose their souls ; the poor and oppressed, the sons and daughters of squalor, those who have no comfort or pleasures in

this life, and have no hope for the next. How tragic a state is that !

Then, there are those who gain *some* of the world, and lose their souls. This is the case with the vast multitude, who get a little pleasure, a small piece of property, a local popularity, a moderate income, and a limited power ; but their gain is in appearance only, and not in reality.

But try and think of the whole world gained ! A moment's reflection will convince one that no man ever had or could have such a prize. Yet, let us interpret the supposition relatively.

It may be said that *Solomon* sought and obtained *world-pleasure*, *Croesus* secured *world-wealth*, and *Alexander the Great* attained to *world-fame*. These three prizes are not all that the world has to give, but conceive of one man enjoying the utmost of all these, and rejecting Christ ; would that be gain ?

Solomon said that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Croesus died in abject misery ; and Alexander while yet a young man, died

a moral ruin, and an utter wreck. To gain the world, then, is a poor prize.

But think now, for a moment, of

LOSING THE SOUL

The value of the human soul is beyond all estimation. It is a scintillation of Deity, the breath of the Almighty, on which is stamped the image of God.

How great is its capacity for deep anguish and thrilling joyousness! How wonderful are the human mind, and heart, and will, and conscience! How amazing are human imagination, and affection, and remorse, and hope!

And how stupendous is the cost of the soul's redemption. It is "not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." So great is the soul's value that Christ died to save us. So great is its value that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth." The soul's value must be estimated by Calvary, and only by this standard are we able to estimate the loss here supposed.

There is nothing to qualify or mitigate the disaster of a soul being lost. Sometimes qualifying circumstances attend losses.

When Belgium was overrun by the Germans, its people humiliated, its cities destroyed, and its treasures taken, there remained a noble King and Queen ; and a now famous picture represents the Kaiser as saying to the King : "You see you have lost all ;" and the King replied : "Not my soul."

The loss of the soul is the loss of all losses, the death of all deaths, a catastrophe unequalled in extent, and unparalleled in its amount through all the universe of God. For its loss there is no compensation ; nothing to countervail or make amends for it. The loss is complete, appalling, and irreparable.

Other losses may be repaired. Carlyle, in May, 1836, lent in manuscript form to John Stuart Mill, the first volume of his "French Revolution," and, through the carelessness of Mill's housemaid, it was burnt. But by September of the same year Carlyle had rewritten it.

Many illustrations could be given of how losses have been and may be repaired, but the loss of the soul is irreparable. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Once forfeited, it is forfeited for ever. The loss can never be made good.

What consummate folly then it is to sacrifice the soul for the world. Let us suppose that a single man might gain the whole world. If in so doing his soul perished, that gain would be the completest loss.

Such a gain would be brief in its duration. We cannot calculate with certainty upon the continuance of any worldly possession during the whole of life. We are not sure of life itself for a single moment.

"Life is even as a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."
"There is but a step between us and death."
"This night thy soul (may) be required of thee."

There is no permanence of possession on earth. There is no fixity of tenure here below. Our goods and effects will pass into

other hands. If then, we possessed the "whole world," we would be liable at any moment to lose, or to leave it. For such precarious gain to sacrifice the soul is criminal folly.

But let us suppose for a moment that one gaining the "whole world" could hold it in perpetuity. *He would not enjoy it all*, because his capacity would not extend to all that he possessed ; because the treasures and possibilities of all he possessed would never be fully disclosed to him ; and because, in any case, he could not make use of them all.

What a small portion of them would meet all the necessities of life. How few of them would suffice for man's limited powers of enjoyment !

"Man needs but little here below,
Nor needs that little long."

For such limited enjoyment to sacrifice the soul is criminal folly. But could any one keep and enjoy the "whole world?" *The gain would not satisfy*. There would still be an aching void which it can never fill.

The temporal and material can never satisfy the soul which has a capacity for the eternal and the spiritual ; and to sacrifice it for these things is an act of criminal folly.

What then "shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?"

There is no profit in this life, for the pursuit of the world is mixed with many sorrows, and dashed with many disappointments ; and, meanwhile, there is no fellowship with God, no discipline of faith, no joy of victory over sin, no growth in grace, and no radiant hope.

And there is no profit in the hour of death. Saladin the warrior, after subjugating Egypt, becoming Sultan of Syria, and retaking Jerusalem from the hands of the Crusaders, had at length to yield to a still mightier Conqueror. A few moments before he breathed his last, he ordered a herald to suspend on the point of a lance the shroud in which he was to be buried, and to cry as he raised it, "Look, here is all that Saladin the great conqueror, the emperor, bears away with him of all his glory."

All worldly gain is reduced to the winding-sheet.

And there is no profit in the day of judgment. The alternatives are : Sacrifice the world and save your soul, or gain the smallest fraction of the world and lose the whole of your soul.

To rely on a possible chance of salvation after Christ's return is the maddest gamble, and you may die at any moment before Christ returns.

“To die with no hope ! hast thou counted the cost ?
To die out of Christ, and thy soul to be lost ?”

“Now is the accepted time : now is the day of salvation.” Take Christ now.

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